

Statement of Jayson Luber helicopter news and traffic reporter for 850 KOA Radio and 9news TV Denver, Colorado on “Transportation Research and Development Needs in the Denver Region” before the Committee on Science Subcommittee on Environment, Technology, and Standards of the U.S. House of Representatives. June 4, 2004

To the distinguished members of the panel,

Hi, I am Jayson Luber, Helicopter news and traffic reporter for 850 KOA Radio and Channel 9 news here in Denver. The transportation issues we will talk about today are close to my heart. On one hand the constant congestion, construction, accidents, stalls and other road hazards I report on a daily basis keeps me employed, on the other hand traffic delays can be some of the most frustrating time and waste of money spent in a person's day. Countless dollars are wasted in stop and go traffic while commuters, truckers, delivery drivers sit and idle their gas away, have to repair and maintain their vehicles brakes and engines more frequently, lose productivity in their job and miss out on quality time they could otherwise spend with their families.

Understanding the Congestion Problem is easy, traffic congestion occurs when the number of vehicles exceeds the capacity of a highway or road. Metro Denver is one of the worst. According to a 2003 study by the Texas Transportation Institute, Denver is the most congested city of its size and the 3rd most congested of all cities nationally. I can vouch for that as I fly above the congestion on a daily basis.

Solving the issue is a tough one since the two major ingredients in congestion, traffic volume and road capacity, are never constant. Sure we can reasonably predict there will be an increase of traffic volume in the morning and afternoon rush to and from work but how much volume is never know until it happens. The second ingredient, road capacity changes with weather, construction, or accidents and stalls. The Federal Highway Administration estimates that 50 percent of traffic delays are caused by these factors.

Now you might think a good solution to the problem is just to build more roads. That can be effective in some areas but in major metropolitan cities, like Denver, that is not always possible. Denver has that problem along I-25 through what we call the narrows, the section of highway between Broadway and University blvd. The T-Rex I-25 highway expansion and light rail project can only widen the interstate from 3 lanes to 4 lanes in each direction there because of the limited space available. Additionally, road construction is expensive, time-consuming and may create additional traffic hazards adding to the congestion.

I personally believe Colorado had been slow in building and expanding our highways at the rate that kept pace with our growth. But in recent years that has improved except for one major interstate. Yes there have been significant improvements in metro Denver like the T-Rex project along I-25; the expansion of E-470 and the Northwest Parkway toll roads; the improvements to I-25 along the north through Erie, Longmont, Loveland and Fort Collins and to the south through Castle Rock, Colorado Springs, Pueblo and Trinidad; and into the mountains over Berthoud and Wolf Creek passes but one major problem remains. Ask any skier or snowboarder what it is. I-70 from Denver to Vail.

I've heard of solutions to that problem that range from trains, to a monorail, to bus only or hov lanes, or just a general widening of the interstate. All solutions come with a huge cost. Ask any

highway construction contractor about the challenges and the huge price tag attached to building a road in the mountains. I believe a monorail is the wrong solution and predict if built the majority of passengers would be tourists to our ski resorts. They are not the ones clogging up I-70 on Saturdays and Sundays. The best solution in my opinion is to expand I-70 to at least 3 lanes in each direction and possibly 4 and also look at expanding Highway 285 from Bailey to Fairplay and Highway 9 from Fairplay to Frisco. I also believe we should study the possibility of getting traffic through the Moffett Tunnel linking Boulder County to Grand County without traffic going over Berthoud Pass and along I-70.

I don't know the estimated costs to the state from a project like this but I do know the costs to the ski resorts if we do nothing to combat the congestion on I-70. Once this past winter my wife and I turned around and came back home from a ski trip because of the hour long delay it took us just to get from Evergreen to Idaho Springs. And we were looking at another 45 minutes to an hour to get to Winter Park from there and then the prospect of driving home in that traffic made us not want to go skiing any longer. How many other front range recreation seekers have done the same thing?

I am not a legislator nor do I play one on the radio or TV but I do know what I see hovering over Denver roadways every day. And I know the frustration of weekend and daily commuters that drive on our highways, they email me all the time. Thank you for inviting me to testify before your committee and for looking at ways to help control Colorado's continuing congestion problems. I look forward to any question you may have.

Reference:

1. Texas Transportation Institute study: <http://mobility.tamu.edu/ums/>
2. Federal Highway Administration study on congestion: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/congestion/>